

CHAPTER 4

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

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This is a summary and evaluation of certain cumulative effects of the exchange as brought to attention during the scoping process and public meetings, and the environmental assessment or which are critical to the NEPA or MEPA environmental review process. Specifics about impacts to individual tracts can be found in the respective sections in the document.

Summary of Impacts to Each Tract

The following *Table 4* lists the impacts by tract for comparison and a short narrative summarizes the primary impacts for each tract. The No Action column of effects primarily reflects the impacts possible if the Alberton Gorge tracts are privately developed, since the other tracts would remain in public ownership and experience no change in current conditions.

Tract A: Alberton Gorge River Corridor

Overall, the acquisition of Alberton Gorge River Corridor presents several minor negative impacts and many *positive* impacts to the physical and human environment.

The negative impacts created by the proposed exchange are primarily related to the proposed future primitive physical development at the three new fishing access sites and limited to 1.5 acres of the approximately 320 proposed for acquisition. These improvements are considered site protection measures and to limit environmental impacts from increased visitation at these sites. Impacts such as dust and potential erosion are minor and temporary impacts, unavoidable during construction. Losses of land productivity, vegetation, and small non-game wildlife are considered minor due to the small acreage impacted. The impacts on the movement and the number of game, non-game and bird species in the area as a result of over 30,000 people using a confined area will continue, whether or not the land corridor is publicly owned.

The most notable positive impacts caused by the proposed exchange are related to the human environment, yet there are several positive impacts to the physical environment, too.

- Approximately seven miles of high quality fisheries habitat and water quality will be preserved.
- FWP will incorporate the property into its existing weed management plan to help combat a serious noxious weed problem in the area.
- Angling access and opportunities will increase.
- The aesthetics of a nearly wild corridor will be preserved.
- FWP will contribute approximately \$11,174 more than what is currently paid into Mineral County tax accounts with few demands beyond current use on county or municipal government services.
- Tourism industries will benefit from the ability to advertise this recreational opportunity as public land and providing increased access.
- Cultural and historic resources (the railroad and other historic features) will be preserved, under the State Antiquities Act.

TABLE 4. Summary of Anticipated Impacts to Each Tract

	<i>A:Alberton Gorge</i>	<i>B:Lower Tarkio</i>	<i>C:Tarkio Section 35</i>	<i>D:Frank Lake FAS</i>	<i>E:R-5 Old Hdqtrs</i>	<i>F:Natural Bridge SP</i>	<i>G:Park Lake FAS</i>	<i>H:Tizer Lakes FAS</i>	<i>I:Hebgen Cabin</i>	Summary of Impacts	NO ACTION
Physical Environment											
Land Resources	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor	None	Minor +	None	None	Minor	Minor
Air	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor	None	None	None	None	Minor	Minor
Water	None	Minor	Minor	None	None	None	Minor +	None	None	Minor	Minor
Wetlands	Minor +	None	None	None	None	None	None (1)	None (1)	None	Minor +	Minor
Vegetation	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor	Minor +	Minor +	None	None	Minor	Minor
Fish & Wildlife	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	None	None	Minor +	None	None	Minor	Minor
Human Environment											
Noise & Electrical Effects	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor	None	None	None	None	Minor	Minor
Land Use	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor +	None	Minor	None	None	Minor	Minor
Risk & Health Hazards	None	None	Minor	None	Minor	Minor +	None	None	None	Minor	Minor
Community Impact	Minor +	Minor	Minor	None	Minor +	None	None	None	None	Minor	Minor
Taxes	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	None	Minor +	Minor
Public Services & Utilities	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	Minor	Minor	Minor	None	None	Minor	Minor
Aesthetics & Recreation	Minor +	Minor	Minor	None	Minor +	Minor +	Minor	None	None	Minor +	Minor
Cultural & Historical Resources	Minor +	None	None	None	None	None	None (2)	None (2)	None(3)	None	Minor
Summary of Impacts	Minor	Minor	Minor	Minor +	Minor	Minor +	Minor +	Minor +	None	Minor +	Minor

None = no impacts are anticipated

Minor = minor impacts may occur

+ = positive impact

(1) Wetlands are present at these sites; however, no impacts are anticipated due to the transfer of land ownership from FWP to FS.

(2) Cultural or historical resources are present at these sites; however, no impacts are anticipated due to the transfer of land ownership from FWP to FS.

(3) Cultural or historical resources are present at this site; however, no impacts are anticipated due to the restrictive easement NorthWestern would voluntarily place on the tract.

The proposed land exchange does not introduce any new potential risks. Traversing a river reach for fishing opportunities and running high class rapids is a recreational adventure available to the public on any navigable river as provided under the Montana Stream Access Law of 1984, and will continue on the Clark Fork though perhaps visitation would drop slightly, even if the Alberton Gorge River Corridor is under private ownership.

No deviations are anticipated from local, state, or federal law, regulations or standards or formal plans. State law mandates that FWP is responsible for developing any necessary plans for river use including registrations, fees, etc, even if the corridor is not acquired.

State or federal permits required for the development at the proposed new fishing access sites will be acquired after funding is procured and prior to any construction on the properties.

FWP acquisition of the Alberton Gorge is supported by a variety of agency resource managers, anglers, outfitters, sportsmen and -women, whitewater enthusiasts and general outdoor recreationists in the entire northwest region of the FS.

Tract B: Lower Tarkio

The transfer of the Lower Tarkio tract from the FS to River Network ownership poses few changes to current conditions. The Lower Tarkio tract would primarily provide road access to Tarkio Section 35 for future residential development and/or timber harvest. Eagle nesting potential is important, but the loss of Lower Tarkio is mitigated with a public land gain of suitable shoreline nesting habitat in the Alberton Gorge River Corridor. Mitigation regarding the transfer of Old Highway 10 within this tract has been completed as a result of FS consultation with SHPO.

Tract C: Tarkio Section 35

Tarkio Section 35 is the tract in this exchange that has the potential to undergo the most change in use and has raised the most concern from local citizens.

Of primary concern is the loss of wildlife habitat if this parcel is developed into 20-acre residential tracts as potentially allowed by Mineral County planning guidelines. In addition, hunting and recreation access would likely be denied if privately owned. Because this type of habitat is not unusual in Mineral County, and the county is over 80% public land, the cumulative impacts of developing this tract are considered minor. Threatened or endangered species are not at significant risk. And though there may be a small, but measurable, reduction in carrying capacity at the herd unit size, large population declines are not anticipated for elk. White-tailed deer will lose severe winter habitat, but populations are not expected to decline. It is probable that the hunter expenditures will remain in the county. Mineral County tax revenue would likely be higher than that generated from FS PILT and 25% Funds. Human distribution and density would increase if this tract is developed.

Consolidating FS and FWP lands at five other areas in the state will aid in habitat and recreation management. Acquisition of the Alberton Gorge will benefit linkage zones for more far-ranging species, which could be slightly impacted if Tarkio Section 35 was developed into residential homesites.

In an effort to mitigate adverse potential wildlife impacts resulting from development of Tarkio Section 35, River Network is pursuing a future land exchange with DNRC, which would allow Tarkio Section 35 to remain under public ownership and would prevent development. This tract adjoins two other sections also under DNRC management.

In the event that the DNRC land exchange fails and Section 35 is sold privately, River Network proposes to apply deed restrictions to mitigate adverse wildlife impacts. River Network has pledged to prohibit residential development on the north side of Interstate 90, keeping these 300 acres accessible to commercial timber harvest but not available for construction of buildings or other permanent human settlement. Although the character of the forest habitat will undergo periodic change through timber removal, the land will remain as part of the habitat base to support the regional wildlife population. This will include seasonal habitat use, as well as its function as a travel corridor.

South of I-90, there is the potential for limited residential development in Section 35, most likely 4 to 6 homesites. This represents a density of one house per approximately 40 to 60 acres, providing the possibility of localized wildlife disturbance by the activities of people, pets and vehicles but generally retaining the character of this open-space forested habitat.

Tract D: Frank Lake

Frank Lake is only 8 miles from the Kootenai NF Murphy Lake Ranger Station. It is an isolated, remote tract for FWP (Kalispell parks office), which can be more efficiently and actively managed by the FS with adjacent lands. The proposed FS designation of this site as a Special Interest Area (under Management Area 21) will protect historically important sites used in the lumber industry, habitat for federally sensitive species such as the loon and boreal toad, and recreational access to a quality fishery.

Tract E: FWP R-5 Old Headquarters

This tract is a maintenance and tax burden to the agency, with value only as a small storage area. This site can provide positive impacts to the community if developed in a responsible way by a private or municipal entity.

Development possibilities and probable impacts have been described assuming this property will be sold to one or more private entities and developed under the existing zoning restrictions.

The public will be involved via city council review of development proposals by the private entity. Conflicts with local, state, or federal regulations are not anticipated.

Tract F: Natural Bridge

Natural Bridge has been jointly maintained by the FS and FWP for nearly 20 years; however, FWP's activity at the site has declined due to its distance from FWP staff headquarters, and in anticipation of trading the property to the FS for over 10 years. The FS would be able to improve the existing recreational facilities at Natural Bridge, consolidate management of the site, and eliminate confusion about enforcement jurisdiction.

The proposed land transfer to the FS would change very little in the management of the site. Only minor impacts were identified in this assessment, which were positive:

- Vegetative impacts include the pro-active removal of noxious weeds by the FS;
- A very slight increase in Sweet Grass County revenue (approximately \$33) may occur (currently is exempt from payments-in-lieu of taxes);
- Future intentions to improve the existing trail to increase accessibility and improve visitor safety will reduce visitor health hazards.

Tract G: Park Lake

Park Lake is surrounded by NFS lands. FWP has had this tract identified for disposal for over 10 years due to the distance from management staff (Helena) and its low regional priority. Consolidating management of the Park Lake area allows for future planning which could have positive impacts on the entire area for wildlife, recreation, and the environment. The FS could expand the recreational facilities and improving access to Park Lake, while emphasizing lakeshore protection. Consolidating the management of this site would eliminate public confusion and law enforcement jurisdiction concerns. These decisions are impaired by the current situation of dual ownership and management in the area.

Tract H: Tizer Lake

This tract is also surrounded by FS lands, including the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit. This, too, is a low FWP regional priority, and receives little oversight. Consolidation of the wildlife management unit would be effective and efficient.

The transfer of the Tizer Lakes FAS to FS ownership poses very few changes to current conditions. Tax revenue may increase very slightly, but management of the area will continue as it has in the past, but with more active and pro-active responses to any environmental concerns due to the FS presence in the area. FWP has had virtually no Parks presence at the site, and fisheries and wildlife are now managed cooperatively with the FS.

Tract I: Hebgen Cabin

Use of this tract will continue to be used intermittently by NorthWestern Energy with no changes to land management practices or land use. The company has voluntarily agreed not to allow commercial use of the site, nor subdivide it under a conservation easement to be implemented with a qualified third party. NorthWestern Energy would continue use of this recreational opportunity for their employees and guests. The company owns the

cabins, which are part of a historical site and would continue to be preserved. Transfer of the tract is not expected to affect TES, migratory birds or other wildlife habitat or use, though continued land management practices could recruit old growth forest.

Cumulative Effects Analysis

Mineral Potential

The Mineral Potential Reports prepared by Norm Smyers, Minerals Examiner, Lolo NF, and Bethany A. Ihle, Geologist, Helena NF (2000) and by Land and Water Consulting (2001), indicate that because the potential for development of the mineral resources on the exchange parcels is unlikely, the overall mineral estates are similar enough to exchange them without changing land valuation.

The reports go on to identify the following occurrences and development potentials.

Occurrence

Sections 34 and 35 and the Frank Lake State tract are favorable for the occurrence of sand and gravel deposits. The Park Lake tract is favorable for the occurrence of climax molybdenum and porphyry copper type deposits. The Tizer Lake tract is favorable for the occurrence of placer gold and porphyry copper type deposits. The Natural Bridges tract has a moderate potential for the occurrence of leasable minerals. The potential occurrence for other mineral deposits on the parcels is rated as low. The Hebgen Cabin tract has low likelihood for occurrence of mineral and energy resources.

Development

The potential for development of any of the minerals on the State parcels is low, primarily due to their development as recreation areas. Additional factors that reduce the potential for development on these parcels includes their relatively small size for leasable activities, hard rock and leasable industry conditions (metal prices and operating climate in Montana) and in the case of the Tizer Lake parcel, poor access to the site.

The potential for development of the outstanding minerals (locatable and leasable) on the Lower Tarkio federal parcel is low because the geology is unfavorable for their occurrence. Thus, the likelihood of a conflict between the surface owner and minerals owner is remote. The sand and gravel resources in the Lower Tarkio tract have been identified (Smyers, 2000) as having good quantity and quality. Because the sand and gravel resources in the Lower Tarkio tract would be exchanged with the surface, the private owner could have the discretionary ability to determine whether or not they would be developed. The potential for the development of mineral resources in Tarkio Section 35 is similar to the Lower Tarkio tract, with all the minerals transferred with the mineral estate.

The likelihood of mineral extraction use of these tracts is low, given land values for timber and residential development. If sand and gravel resources are extracted on Lower Tarkio tract and/or Tarkio Section 35, the aesthetic value of the area would diminish.

Some excavation on Tarkio Section 35 could be hidden from distant viewpoints (the river) due to the timbered, gentle slope of the tract.

Given the low likelihood of mineral development on the tracts to be transferred to River Network, and the transfer of FWP properties to the FS, the exchange will have no cumulative adverse effects on the mineral resources.

Access

Table 7, below, approximates the number of road miles acquired by each agency if the proposed exchange is implemented. The “Public Services, Utilities” section under the corresponding tract gives details identifying the roads within each parcel. Roads range from gravel, which serves all vehicles at a moderate user comfort (levels B4) to slow, single lane, rough road open to high clearance vehicles only (levels D2). Level of service and their maintenance conditions are expected to remain similar to the existing levels if the exchange is completed.

The FS will have a net loss of two-tenths of a mile (0.2) of roads in the proposed exchange. The primary gain is at Frank Lake (approximately 1.4 miles), which receives low visitation and currently is not maintained at a high level. In comparison to the thousands of road miles maintained by the NFS in Montana alone, this change in FS road ownership volume is negligible. This exchange does not propose to close any existing roads. The roads impacted by the exchange are primary access roads to the recreational attraction within the tract.

River Network will gain approximately 2.1 road miles, primarily in the acquisition of Lower Tarkio and Tarkio Section 35. Unless a future exchange occurs with DNRC, it is likely that the subject roads will be improved and additional roads improved or developed in Tarkio Section 35 to complete timber harvest and residential development. Road system design and development would be subject to county review, and according to the Mineral County planner, most likely would require some type of dust abating treatment.

Private road-miles added in Tarkio Section 35 could reduce the carrying capacity of elk. The wilderness-like aesthetic value of the tract would diminish. Hunters would not likely be able to use this property. This tract, however, is in a county and part of Montana where public, timbered land with few roads is abundant. Cumulatively, the loss of 2.1 miles of public roads with potentially a few more miles for subdivision purposes is not a significant adverse impact. The voluntary restrictions for development which River Network would place on the land would mitigate most impacts to wildlife.

The roads that FWP is disposing would continue to be open to the public under FS ownership to access the sites.

The public will gain a large amount of physical access to the lands along the Gorge to be access by foot, either from Highway 10 or the river. Acquisition of the old railroad bed has potential for future hike/bike paths. A precedent has been set by trails on the same

line east of the Montana/Idaho border. About 3 miles of railroad grade is included in the proposed properties along the Gorge.

TABLE 7. Summary of Road Miles Gained and Lost

Tract	Existing Traffic Service Levels (A-D)^a	Existing Road Maintenance Levels (5-1)^b	Approximate Miles Gained or Lost				
			U.S. gain	U.S. loss	FWP gain	FWP loss	River Network gain
A-Alberton Gorge	D	2			0.6		
B-Lower Tarkio	B	4		0.9			0.9
C-Tarkio Section 35	D	2		1.1			1.1
D-Frank Lake	C	3	1.4			1.4	
E-FWP R-5 Hdqtr	n/a	n/a				0	0
F-Natural Bridge	B	4	0.1 ^c			0.1	
G-Park Lake	B	4	0.3 ^c			0.3	
H-Tizer Lake	D	2	0.5			0.5	
I-Hebgen Cabin	D	3		0.1			0.1
TOTALS	-	-	2.3	1.8	0.6	2.3	2.1

^a Traffic Service Levels (based on FS Manual 7709.58,10):

A – Serves all vehicles on a safe, stable, smooth road surface.

B – Serves all vehicles, slower speeds, periodic dust and traffic congestion.

C – Limited use, low speed, limited passing, with some difficult segments.

D – Singular use, slow, one-way traffic on rough, irregular surface.

^b Road Maintenance Levels (based on FS Manual 7709.58,10):

5 – High user comfort.

4 – Moderate user comfort

3 – Open to passenger car use.

2 – High clearance vehicles.

1 – Closed; custodial care only.

^c Roads within these tracts are currently under an easement to the FS from FWP. If the exchange is implemented, no net gain or loss will be incurred.

Wetlands and Flood Plains

Details of the wetlands or flood plains information listed below, can be read under the individual tracts, in the “Water and Flood Plains” section, and the “Vegetation, Wetlands, Prime & Unique Farmlands” section. Wetlands on the FWP properties proposed for transfer to the FS were estimated primarily using information provided by EA Engineering, *Little Lost Creek Land Exchange Wetlands/Riparian Areas Resource Report*, November 1992, prepared for the U.S. Forest Service and local FS or FWP staff. Wetlands and flood plains information on the Lower Tarkio tract and the Tarkio Section 35 is based on evaluation by Lolo NF Hydrologist, Arne Rosquist in June 2000.,

Wetlands in the Alberton Gorge (at proposed fishing access sites only) were evaluated by the local FWP wildlife biologist. Flood plain estimates are based on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Federal Insurance Administration, Flood Hazard Boundary Maps provided by Karl Christians, DNRC Flood Plain Management Section Supervisor, Helena or local FS staff.

TABLE 5. *Transfer Summary of Estimated Jurisdictional Wetlands and Flood Plains.*

Tract	disposing agency	acquiring agency	total tract acres	estimated acres of jurisdictional wetlands	estimated acres 100 year flood plains
A-Alberton Gorge	NorthWestern Energy	River Network/FWP	approx. 320	0 at FAS sites	160
B-Lower Tarkio	U.S.	River Network	34.40	0	0
C-Tarkio S 35	U.S.	River Network	640.00	0	0
D-Frank Lake	FWP	U.S.	90.40	0	7.5
E-FWP R-5 Hdqtr	FWP	River Network	2.66	0	0
F-Natural Bridge	FWP	U.S.	40.00	0	0
G-Park Lake	FWP	U.S.	95.88	46	0
H-Tizer Lake	FWP	U.S.	142.29	9	0
I-Hebgen Cabin	U.S.	River Network/ NW Energy	approx 3.00	0	0
TOTAL ACRES ACQUIRED		U.S. FWP RIVER NETWORK		55 0 0	7.5 160 0

All wetlands and flood plains included in the proposed exchange will come under federal or state ownership and will be afforded protection under state and/or federal laws. No wetlands or flood plains will transfer into private ownership as a result of this exchange. No adverse effects will occur to wetlands because the stewardship responsibility will be shifted from FWP to the FS. The FS will experience a net gain in wetlands and flood plains.

Old Growth and Timber

The FS is not disposing of old growth timber in the Lower Tarkio and Tarkio Section 35 tracts according to Mike Hillis, former Wildlife Biologist on the Lolo National Forest. The Hebgen Cabin tract does contain a small amount of timber that is considered old growth recruitment, but is not currently managed for old growth (*Specialist Report – Timber and Old Growth*, Case Number MTM-89593, Land and Water Consulting, September 2003).

Evaluations were not completed to determine old growth timber on all the state parcels, since the stewardship of these areas will come into federal ownership and would be protected under the individual Forest Plans and federal protection law. Details of timber types and how the volumes were estimated on the individual parcels can be read under the respective sections and the subheading: “Vegetation, Wetlands, Prime & Unique Farmlands.” Or the FS can be contacted to review the individual specialist reports.

TABLE 6. Summary of Estimated Board Feet to be Transferred from/to the FS.

	<i>FS transfers to River Network</i>			<i>FS acquisitions</i>			
	<i>B:Lower Tarkio</i>	<i>C:Tarkio Section 35</i>	<i>I:Hebgen Cabin</i>	<i>D:Frank Lake FAS</i>	<i>F:Natural Bridge SP</i>	<i>G:Park Lake FAS</i>	<i>H:Tizer Lakes FAS</i>
MBF of Timber	100	5,110	25	880	-	100	392
Total MBF	5,235+ mbf			1,372+ mbf			

*MBF = thousand board feet

The net loss of timber volume above is not considered a significant adverse impact. The timber loss primarily occurs with the disposal of Tarkio Section 35 and Lower Tarkio, which do not include old growth timber. Agency wildlife biologists concur that the loss of this small acreage of potential old growth habitat on Tarkio Section 35 and 34 will not place pileated woodpeckers at significant risk in the area. The loss may adversely impact individuals, but will not lead to federal listing of flammulated owls. Private and corporate lands in the Tarkio area are larger tracts including timber, and two timbered sections of state land border Tarkio Section 35. These tracts are in an area of the county and state that has a high percentage of publicly owned and timbered land; therefore, the disposal not a large loss to the overall NFS nor wildlife.

The Hebgen Cabin tract timber would not be harvested if FS retained ownership due to its old growth recruitment values, nor would it be removed after transfer to NorthWestern Energy due to its aesthetic values near a recreational cabin site. The exception would be to provide visitor safety. Wildlife use of the potential old growth features on this tract (in

the immediate vicinity of the cabins) may be precluded by human use whether or not the FS owns the tract. Due to the small acreage and no change in use of the Hebgen Cabin tract, this transfer of this site to private ownership will have no adverse effect to the Gallatin NF, wildlife, or overall source of old growth resources.

The FS will replace about 25% of the timber volume lost in the exchange with tracts acquired from FWP, considered inholdings and adjacent lands. The benefit of the acquired timber is the ability of the FS to manage these areas in ways that coincide with adjoining area timber (old growth) management practices and wildlife habitat.

Fish and Wildlife

Wildlife and habitat are generally expected to benefit on the tracts transferred to FWP and the FS. The exchange would enable the agencies to actively manage the sites with specific resource goals. They will be able to protect the sites from overuse and irresponsible use. Acquisition of the Alberton Gorge will connect blocks of public land for better linkage zones used by wide-ranging species. Fisheries habitat for the threatened bull trout and native westslope cutthroat trout can also be protected.

Angling opportunities will increase along the Alberton Gorge with the development of three new fishing access sites. The pocket water in this stretch offers some good fishing. Angler harvest is not expected to detrimentally affect the fish population in the Clark Fork River. Bull trout are not common in this stretch, and regulations prohibit purposeful angling for bull trout due to their threatened status. Westslope cutthroat trout must be released as part of the state's recovery program, as well. Incidental catch of these species may increase from the additional anglers. The new FASs provide an avenue to post educational material about these species to mitigate potential impacts.

Angling opportunities and fish populations at the FWP tracts transferred to the FS will remain similar to historic levels.

It is foreseeable that all gentle slopes between Missoula and Superior would become developed with homes in the next 50 years. The Gorge will retain some of those gentle slopes on the north and south sides of the river for wildlife habitat. Wildlife migration corridors between the Bitterroot Divide south of the river and the Ninemile Divide north of I-90 will be somewhat improved because FWP acquisition of Alberton Gorge will connect several public properties north and south of the river.

Conversely, Tarkio Section 35 would remove a portion of a public land block. It is recognized that the wildlife habitat in Tarkio Section 35 will change if development occurs, though not eliminate the ability for wildlife to cross in this area using public land. Existing effects include: traffic on I-90, existing residences, ecosystem burning and logging in the Stark Horse area. One sensitive species, the flammulated owl, could be affected to a minor degree in the future due to a lack of old growth recruitment if Tarkio Section 35 is developed. Minor impacts are anticipated to white-tailed deer and elk, and hunting opportunities. There will be a minor increase in nuisance species and crop

depredation. Because the impacts to wildlife are not expected to cause large population declines in regional wildlife, the Alberton Gorge Land Exchange is not anticipated to greatly impact wildlife adversely.

Restrictions voluntarily placed on development within Section 35 by River Network would mitigate potential impacts to wildlife. As discussed in the Summary of Effects section above, that portion of the section north of Interstate 90, about 300 acres, would be limited to timber management practices. The area south of Interstate 90 would be limited to probably four to six residential lots, thus ranging in size from 40-60 acres. Furthermore, River Network is pursuing a future exchange which would place the Tarkio Section 35 under DNRC management, rather than sell residential lots.

Hazardous Materials

All sites being transferred to the FS or FWP were surveyed for the presence of hazardous materials. Soils and water quality testing for various materials found in Park Lake as a result of historical mining were found to be below standard state levels. Soil replacement occurred at the FWP Old Region 5 Headquarters to remove petroleum waste; asbestos siding is present on one of the residences on the property. Hazardous materials were not found at other sites in the exchange, nor will hazardous materials be produced on these sites.

Community Impact

The transfer of the state tracts to the FS will not change their use for recreation, therefore few if any changes to the area communities are anticipated. The traditional rafting will continue in the Alberton Gorge, with an increase in angling opportunities, however, this is also not expected to alter the surrounding communities. It will add an element to the tourism industry to aid with attracting visitors.

Tarkio Section 35 has the potential to undergo the most change in use, therefore it also has the highest potential for impacting the neighboring communities of Tarkio and Superior. In the long-term, this change would be anticipated without the current exchange. There is a demand in western Montana for land to build recreational homes or rural residential homes. Though this development has a tendency to change the social make-up of a community, it is bound to happen to some degree. Tarkio Section 35 is an isolated parcel with low priority within the agency because of this. The benefit of the proposed exchange is that public land (FS) is exchanged for public land (Alberton Gorge) in the same county. Surprisingly, this exchange does reduce the amount of public land in the county, which is of local interest.

River Network is attempting to mitigate impacts to Mineral County by pursuing a future exchange that would allow development in areas in which the county planners feel correspond more to surrounding development. This has been supported by Mineral County.

Taxes

Counties across the state will generally see a slight increase in payments received from the new property owners. The FS payments will be slightly higher than what FWP paid for the same land, based on previous years PILT and 25% Fund data.

Because Mineral County consists of over 80% public land, tax base is an important issue to their local infrastructure. NorthWestern Energy paid a minimal amount on the Gorge property. The proposed exchange will increase taxes (PILT) paid to the county by about \$11,174 from FWP, alone. This will come from the fishing license funds because the lands taxed will be fishing access sites.

Recreational Opportunity and Aesthetics

The entire exchange arose from the general public's desire to preserve a rare environmental expanse for generations and realizing that the trend of Montana's landscape is to become scattered with homes. The benefits of open space are being recognized across the nation. A large benefit of FWP acquiring Albertain Gorge is to retain the aesthetic values of the timbered and rocky canyon walls. The Albertain Gorge conserves a 7-mile corridor for a variety of public outdoor recreation activities. It attracts people from a broad area, including local towns, the state, the northwestern states and foreign countries. The acquisition of this tract by FWP allows continued use and improved access of the tract. The proposed FASs will help disperse the volume of visitors and disperse user types. More of the Gorge can be utilized and allow more people to enjoy its recreational opportunities in a variety of ways.

FWP Region 2 State Parks Manager Lee Bastian and local guides are seeing use in the greater Albertain Gorge is steadily increasing. Camping is becoming more common at certain areas along the Gorge and may continue to increase with more land available, particularly on higher benches. Floaters have a limited number of places that physically allow camping or day use by groups. These points of recreation may become crowded and reduce the solitude and quiet aesthetics of the area. Some of these impacts are occurring now and would continue if the No Action alternative is chosen. The proposed exchange, however, allows FWP to better manage the corridor, resources, and recreational opportunities, including planning, monitoring, and implementing strategies that can address problems. Agency ownership of the Gorge allows flexibility in solving problems.

The number of commercial companies providing rafting trips cannot increase due to a FWP Commission rule, which limits the number of outfitters; however, the total number of people served by these companies is not limited. Private individuals wishing to traverse the Albertain Gorge are not limited. Kayaking use seems to be increasing and as extreme sports gain popularity, recreationists may begin using the Gorge for new sports. If visitation continues to increase, the solitude currently offered in this canyon may decline. Some type of restrictions limiting floaters or visitors may be necessary in the future.

The transfer of four state parcels to the FS will provide historically similar recreation opportunities. Incorporation of these tracts into the Forest Plans and developing formal management plans for these sites will thoroughly evaluate the potential for recreation while protecting the environment. The projects proposed by the FS will improve access for those with disabilities as well as reduce risks to the user. The use of the sites will remain similar to existing use, therefore overall impacts will be slight.

The Montana Department of Commerce-Travel Montana supports the land exchange because it secures long term public access at the Gorge and the other 4 tracts around the state. The exchange can also maintain and improve the quality of recreation opportunities. Please refer to the Tourism Report in **Appendix 2**.

The transfer of Tarkio Section 35 has been controversial at the local level due to the potential loss of public recreation opportunities if developed into residential home sites. This loss has been recognized and mitigation is being pursued with a future land exchange that would return this tract to public ownership (DNRC). In the current exchange, the loss of recreation in Tarkio Section 35 would be exchanged for recreation opportunities in the Alberton Gorge and management improvements at other recreational facilities. The large-scale benefits of improving recreation in these areas, and thus focusing residential development and aesthetic impacts in one area slated for disposal by the FS, are thought to outweigh the alternatives. The number of people impacted by retaining an isolated parcel of FS land is much fewer than the thousands of people influenced by recreating in the Gorge, canoeing at Park Lake, riding an OHV into Tizer Lake, fishing at Frank Lake, and hiking at Natural Bridge.

Aesthetics of Tarkio Section 35 would be slightly altered with the addition of homes and associated buildings on this section. The interstate cuts through the section; the old Highway and logging roads traverse the section; the railroad grade contributes a man-made grade and large cut bank above the river on the Lower Tarkio tract. If developed as the county growth and development plan suggests, into 20-acre parcels, the timber retained in the section and the gentle slope of the property will aid in softening the aesthetic impacts of development. This is considered a minor negative impact to the local existing residents. The locale and character of this property will be aesthetically attractive to people looking to buy rural residential property and become a member of the community.

Cultural & Historical Resources

Any cultural sites occurring on lands transferred to the FS from FWP will be afforded continued protection pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 16 U.S.C. 470 (f)) as federal property, which meet or exceed Montana cultural site protection requirements. Thus, no impacts would be incurred to lands transferring to the FS.

The Alberton Gorge will be afforded similar consideration under FWP ownership. The proposed fishing access site areas have been surveyed for cultural sites. FWP consulted with SHPO and both determined that the proposed construction at these sites would not alter resources with cultural or historical significance.

The Tarkio tracts proposed for transfer from the FS to River Network do include portions of the Old State Highway 10. The Lolo NF has consulted with the SHPO, and after the FS mitigated concerns regarding the old highway in this tract, SHPO has approved FS disposal of the Lower Tarkio tract.

NorthWestern currently owns the cabins on the Hebgen Cabin tract which contribute to the historical significance of the site. The company has agreed to continue the historical use of the site and to formally protect the resources by voluntarily implementing a conservation easement with a qualified third party.